

Symposium of Art History – Department of Art History, Willamette University

Lines of Attention.

Collecting Drawings in Europe, 1500–1800: Practices and Protagonists.

Willamette University – Paulus Lecture Hall (College of Law)
245 Winter Street SE – Salem, OR
Sept. 24, 2011

Program of the Symposium

9–9:30 a.m.

Welcoming Coffee and Breakfast

9:30–9:45 a.m.

Ann Nicgorski, Chair of the Department of Art History, Willamette University

Introduction

9:45–10:15 a.m.

Robert Williams, University of California, Santa Barbara

Vasari as a Collector of Drawings

Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574) assembled an enormous collection of drawings over the course of his career. One imagines that his motives were numerous. Like all artists, he collected drawings that were of use to him in his day-to-day activity as an artist; he also made and collected drawings of works of art as sources of information for use in the writing of the “Lives” (*Le Vite dei più eccellenti architetti pittori e scultori*, 1550). Finally, he probably acquired some drawings as objects of beauty in themselves, that is, in the way that most subsequent collectors who were not themselves artists have.

Vasari is unique among collectors, however, in having used his collection as a supplement to a great didactic text, the second edition of the “Lives” (1568). In addition to using drawings and prints as *aides memoires*, he also refers repeatedly to the drawings in his collection as “documents” that support his account of history and of the progress of art. For Vasari, *disegno* – drawing or design – was essential to his view of what art is as well as to the organization of its development over time. Together with the philosophical definition of *disegno* at the very beginning of the book, the ongoing discussion of drawing style sustained throughout and exemplified by particular drawings, helps to clarify the nature of that development and to define the kind of understanding – the specifically art-historical understanding – that he hopes to promote among connoisseurs and potential patrons as well as among artists.

10:15–10:30 a.m.

Coffee Break

10:30–11 a.m.

Ricardo De Mambro Santos, Willamette University

Van Mander and the Drawing Collections in Holland around 1600

In the “Book of Painting” (*Het Schilder-Boeck*, 1604), Karel van Mander (1548–1606) remarks an increasingly diffused phenomenon among 16th-century Dutch and Flemish artists, namely to collect drawings and prints made by masters of the past, such as Jan van Eyck, Lucas van Leyden and Pieter Bruegel. By providing irreplaceable – and thus timeless – models of “artistic perfection,” these collections transformed old workshops into new *cabinets d’amateurs* in which contemporary artists could find the roots of their “noble” and “liberal” profession.

As potential containers of history, or “guardians of memory” as Van Mander puts it, the collections of drawings not only perform an important didactic role during the training process of young painters, but assume an even more significant function when gathered by accomplished artists, that is, to provide canons of “perfection” (*volcomenheyt*) that are expected to be studied and carefully emulated. Consequently, the art of painting – previously considered as a manual practice able to capture, in a mirror-like image, all forms of nature – starts being regarded as a highly individualized method of visual construction that aims to render, first of all, the variety of styles adopted by illustrious masters of the past. This paper will explore the connections, suggested by Van Mander, between this particular aesthetic ideal – painting as a meta-representation – and the systematic habit of collecting drawings in Holland around 1600, especially among artists such as Hendrick Goltzius and Cornelis van Haarlem.

11–11:15 a.m.

Coffee Break

11:15–11:45 a.m.

Kristel Smentek, MIT-Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Drawings and the Eighteenth-Century Science of the Connoisseur

Eighteenth-century art connoisseurs saw themselves as practitioners of a science. Like natural history, connoisseurship was understood as a branch of knowledge based on methodical and rational principles, and founded on the comparative study of visual material. Focusing on the celebrated French collector and connoisseur, Pierre-Jean Mariette (1694–1774), this paper examines the centrality of drawings in 18th-century connoisseurial discourse, and the links between connoisseurial practices and those of the emergent natural sciences.

Eighteenth-century writers theorized drawings as purer, less mediated expressions of an artist's characteristic manner than paintings. Connoisseurs like Mariette thus established their reputations through expertise in the analysis of artists' drawn studies and sketches. At his death, Mariette's collection numbered over 9000 drawings, all elegantly mounted on his distinctive blue mats. His cabinet included works from all schools and periods, by both the great masters and less familiar draftsmen. More surprisingly, by today's standards, Mariette also frequently restored the sheets he owned by drawing on them, recombining them, and occasionally by splitting single-sheet, recto-verso drawings into two. Such seemingly heavy-handed interventions appear to be at odds with the priority granted to artists' drawings in theories of connoisseurship; it is the aim of this paper to show that they are not. Through the cumulative, comparative examination of thousands of works, the connoisseur, like the natural historian, had methodically and rationally learned over time to see the typical or regular forms underlying the surface particularities of individual examples. Such knowledge facilitated Mariette's increasingly precise classifications of old master drawings, and it gave him the authority to "bring faded drawings back to life," as one contemporary admiringly wrote, and restore the utility of drawings for a science different from, yet formative of, the forms of knowledge production we call art historical.

11:45 a.m.–12:30 p.m.

Discussion

12:30–2 p.m.

Lunch Break

2–2:30 p.m.

Blair Hixson Davis, University of California, Irvine

The Roman Drawings of Charles Percier

In 1786 Charles Percier (1764–1838) was awarded the *Grand Prix de Rome*, the highest honor given to a student of architecture in France. During his subsequent five years of study in Rome, he made nearly two thousand drawings of the city and its monuments. Soon after his return to Paris, Percier and his partner Pierre-François-Léonard Fontaine rose to the position of Napoléon Bonaparte's favorite architects, developing the era's signature Empire style.

Percier's Roman drawings represent subjects he selected according to his own personal taste and interest rather than the academy's program, revealing the practical skills and theoretical orientation that Percier brought to his partnership with Fontaine. They document his interaction with the diversity of Rome's visual models which served as a lifelong inspiration to Percier's career, both in the eclecticism of his works and as one of France's most influential teachers. Victor Baltard, one of Percier's students, described how throughout his life Percier kept eight volumes of these most beautiful drawings close at hand as a reference for himself and his students. These images of Rome, so crucial to his career and legacy, merit attention not only for the insights they provide into Percier's development, but also for their influence on the next generation of architects.

2:30–2:45 p.m.

Coffee Break

2:45–3:15 p.m.

Dawn Odell, Lewis and Clark College

Art as Evidence in van Braam's Collection of Chinese Drawings

In the late eighteenth century, Andreas Everardus van Braam Houckgeest (1739–1801) led a Dutch Embassy to the Qing court in Beijing and amassed during this voyage a collection of hundreds of watercolor drawings by Chinese artists. Rather than return to the Netherlands, van Braam made a new home in America, where he published the memoirs of his journey in French (1797) and dedicated them to George Washington. In addition to providing the models for engraved illustrations within the text, van Braam's drawing collection is cited within his memoirs as "proof" of his status as traveler and evidence for the veracity of the information presented within his text.

This paper will consider van Braam's drawing collection, recently rediscovered and now held by the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, as a form of proto-ethnography that functioned in concert with van Braam's other great collection, that of Chinese porcelain. As a semi-public site, van Braam's home in Philadelphia and the drawing and porcelain collections contained within it were the physical evidence of van Braam's experience as well as a manifestation of Chinese aesthetics. Van Braam's collections establish connections between art and artifact and help us to understand the ways that ethnography, "beauty," and the museum are linked in the early modern period.

3:15–3:45 p.m.

Discussions and final remarks

4 p.m.

Visit to the exhibit *Timeless Renaissance. Italian Drawings from the Alessandro Maggiori Collection* at the Hallie Ford Museum of Art

Symposium organized by Ricardo De Mambro Santos
Department of Art History, Willamette University